

WELFARE AND POPULATION*

By the Right Rev. E. W. BARNES, Sc.D., F.R.S.

Bishop of Birmingham

WE have created the Welfare State. It is a great achievement. For the first time in our history the whole population of the country is in a position to get adequate medical attention. Everyone should be able to receive care of general health, together with provision for defective teeth and eyesight. There is also available expert care for infant and child welfare. So far as possible, life will be made tolerable for the aged. In no other country does such large-scale provision exist, though doubtless our lead will, in due course, be followed elsewhere.

As regards the individual citizen the policy which has thus created the Welfare State is right. It deserves and has received almost universal Christian and humanist approval. But social reforms create new situations in which new and sometimes very troublesome problems arise. Some such problems now emerging are worth our careful attention. I give examples.

Many a West Indian island is to-day a crowded slum. Children born survive if they are vigorous; each one that dies relieves congestion. Naturally such inhabitants as can claim British citizenship are coming here in large numbers to avoid such congestion and to enjoy the benefits of the Welfare State.

Other peoples come here; Eastern pedlars throng our street markets; our fame has gone out into all the world.

Three months ago my wife and I were at a city in central France. The chambermaid at the hotel had a daughter learning hotel work in England. She told us of her. I sum up the story in isolated words and phrases. Appendicitis; an operation with the best surgical

skill; a convalescent home. All free of charge. To the joyful mother the record seemed too good to be true.

Now for the other side of the picture.

In the great days of Elizabeth the population of England and Wales was probably rather more than 4 million. In 1811 it had risen to 10 million. By 1900 it was over 30 million. It is now estimated to be more than 44 million.

We are over-populated. We cannot produce enough food for our people, even though the fertility of our land has been artificially increased. We have to buy large, and ever larger, quantities of food from abroad. As we all know, the task, for a virtually bankrupt country, is most difficult.

Malthus, a Cambridge don, saw a century and a half ago what could be the result of an unrestricted increase of population. The crisis which he foresaw was averted by emigration. There were still large empty spaces of the earth ready to receive our people, especially in North America and Australasia. Also a vast industrial development took place in Britain. By good fortune we were ahead of other peoples. We sold the goods we made in increasing amounts and consequently could buy ever-increasing quantities of food. The nineteenth century was our golden age. Now the vacant spaces of the world are nearly full. The competition of other countries is formidable. We look like being permanently the paupers of the English-speaking world. We need to restrict our population.

The instinct that population-increase is good—be it of a family, of a city, or of a nation—is so strong as to be all-prevailing. It is embedded in the religious traditions of most races. Despots use it to increase their armies. Politicians, to whom patriotism is a valuable asset, point proudly to increased

* Address by the Bishop of Birmingham at a luncheon of the Rotary Club, Birmingham.

numbers. And yet our population is now too large, and must be diminished.

Will it fall under the working of the Welfare State? Obviously not, without teaching which will be unpopular, coupled with practical measures which will arouse indignant opposition.

In reducing the population we must preserve the better stocks in the population and hinder the increase of the worse.

Now I do *not* mean preserve the rich and get rid of the poor. We need to preserve the good-living, honest, hard-working classes in our people, whether they be rich or poor. But we need to get rid of the slovenly, vicious, idle wasters of the community. Unfortunately the Welfare State is only too likely to encourage their increase.

A challenge will come from those who do not believe that good and bad qualities are alike inherited. Such people say that if you mate members of a bad stock and put them to live in a first-class housing area sound citizens will be produced. I wish it were true; it would make our social problems so much easier. But all our leading eugenists in the Western world assert that it is untrue. Analysis of facts in the light of the fundamental discoveries of Mendel and Morgan shows that bad stocks propagate bad stocks. At least 90 per cent of feeble-mindedness is inherited. A time is quickly coming when sterilization of the unfit will have to be essential in our social organization. Such sterilization may well be, in fact, the complement of the Welfare State.

I know that there are those who say that

bad stocks evolve in slums where dirt and disease are rife. I have met two or three Members of Parliament who believe it. In Russia the belief is orthodox Soviet genetics, associated with the name of Lysenko. But even I, in spite of the beliefs attributed to me, do not think that the Soviet leaders are always right! We must get rid of our slums; we must give all possible help to the poor and unfortunate; but we must not let the Welfare State spoil, rather than improve, the quality of our population. You cannot "gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles," as was said by a very great Teacher.

What is to be done? I merely put the problem: I cannot give a solution. We must limit immigration, whether from India, South Africa, the West Indies or East Europe. We must educate our citizens to have smaller families. We must have medically controlled sterilization of the unfit on a large scale.

Many are beginning to think that medically-controlled euthanasia for defective infants should be an element in our social policy. I have met mothers of such children who have been thankful when death has brought release. What should be the Christian attitude to these questions, what the attitude of the humanist?

All over the world population is now increasing dangerously. Our moral prestige is still so high that other peoples tend to follow our example. Are populations to increase everywhere till an explosion comes and the miseries of atomic warfare end for a time the anxieties of starvation. Think on these things.

SOCIETY OF COMPARATIVE LEGISLATION

"For the promotion of knowledge of the course of legislation in different countries, more particularly in the several parts of His Majesty's Dominions, and in the United States."

President: The Rt. Hon. Lord MACMILLAN, G.C.V.O.

Chairman of the Executive Committee: The Rt. Hon. Lord Justice COHEN

Editors: Professor F. H. LAWSON, D.C.L. Sir CECIL CARR, K.C.B., K.C.,
assisted by

Sir ARNOLD McNAIR, K.C., and Professor H. C. GUTTERIDGE, K.C.

Honorary Secretary: E. H. WALL, Esq.

Annual Subscription - - - ONE GUINEA

Address: 18, NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, LONDON, W.C.2